

What and How Do Poems Know?

An Ancient Question Reconsidered in the Light of Gilbert Ryle's Distinction between "Knowing That" and "Knowing How"

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I

The arts, literature and poetry have always – that is, at least since Hesiod – staked their own particular truth claims. As the Muses tell the poet in the *Theogony*:

There is much we tell you that only resembles reality,
But, if we wish, we reveal to you also pure truth itself¹.

With questions which particular form or mode of knowledge that might be, what kind of truth the *rhapsode* can claim for himself and how that relates to the knowledge of a strategist, a charioteer, a physician or even to the knowledge a *rhapsode* has of his own craft, Socrates in Plato's *Ion* will confront his partners in dialogue, exposing them to the most confusing aporias². The challenge to bring greater clarity to this puzzling question is taken up by Aristotle in the ninth chapter of his *Poetics*, which famously compares and contrasts the knowledge of a historian with that of a poet: according to him the historiographer's knowledge is one of concrete facts appertaining to empirical reality, that of the poet, in contrast, is a knowledge of possibilities and probabilities and thus *philosophóteron kai spoudaioteron*, more philosophical and more serious than the historian's. Thus, for Aristotle, poetic knowledge occupies an in-between place, a middle ground, between the knowledge of the historian and that of the philosopher: while the former relates to the specific or particular (*ta kath'hékaston*) and the latter to the general (*ta kathólu*), the poet's knowledge mediates between, and combines, the particular and the general and derives from this its unique virtue and power to move the listener or reader³.

Aristoteles' question and even more so his answers have reverberated through all periods of Western *Geistesgeschichte* whenever poetry and the arts have been challenged to defend and legitimise their own uses and their own claims to truth. In the English Renaissance, Sir Philip Sidney, for instance, quotes large chunks of Aristotle's argument almost verbatim in his

*Apology for Poetry*⁴, and, under the auspices of Modernism, W. K. Wimsatt's theory of poetry, according to which poems, as all aesthetic objects, convey "concrete universals", which – along the lines of Hegel's aesthetics – mediate and synthesise the concrete and the universal, is but one of the more recent versions of it⁵.

The question I would like to raise here is smaller in scale – not the general question what poetry knows and how poetry knows what it knows, but the smaller question, which is but a pointed aspect of this larger one and which has already been aired in Plato's *Ion*, namely what poetry and poets know about themselves, how they know that and, above all, how they communicate this knowledge. And I shall not, once again, evoke Aristotle's authority in this context, but a philosophical text of the middle of the twentieth century which addresses not questions of aesthetics or poetics at all and has, to my knowledge, never been considered in such a context before. I am referring to Gilbert Ryle's 1945 lecture delivered to the British "Aristotelian Society", which discusses, under the title *Knowing How and Knowing That* the strictly epistemological question of different modes of knowing and different types of knowledge⁶. Ryle's *knowing that* is a knowledge that can be discursively expressed in propositions and that we find in its purest form in the textbooks of science; it is the knowledge «that something is the case». *Knowing how*, in contrast, is the knowledge of «how to do things»⁷. Where *knowing that* is the domain of texts and maps and diagrams, which store and order information and make it retrievable, *knowing how* is the performative mode of knowledge, the knowledge of a craftsman or an artist on how to work with his materials and tools, or the knowledge of an acrobat, a musician, a dancer or a shaman how to move his body, or the knowledge of a scientist how to arrange and conduct an experiment and represent the results to greatest advantage. This is an embodied knowledge, the bodily trace of prior training through imitation, repetition, trial and error and perfecting practice and thus also a form of memory, one that has inscribed itself into the body. It resides in a "remembering how", a kinaesthetic memory which does not lend itself readily or at all to being translated in texts or diagrams – just think of how problematic any notation for dances is. One acquires it therefore not by studying texts or diagrams but by doing, and one memorises it and makes it one's own through repeated re-enactment and practice.

Knowing how is not, Ryle insists, the practical "application" of some prior theoretical knowledge or knowledge of rules but «is realised in performances which conform to the rule, not in theoretical citations of it»⁸. (In German one might, perhaps, express the opposition between these two forms in terms of "kennen" for *knowing that* vs. "können" for *knowing how*.) Or, summed up in Ryle's genealogical metaphor: «the propositional

acknowledgement of rules, reasons or principles is not the parent of the intelligent application of them; it is a step-child of that application»⁹. *Knowing how* is actualised and instantiated in what the knowing person does and how he or she does it and can only be extended, perfected and conveyed to others in processes involving bodily and sensuous experiences and interactions, not «in the propounding of propositions» or in the «accumulation of pieces of knowledge-that»¹⁰.

The seduction is great to relate this *knowing how* model of performative knowledge to the kind of knowledge actualised and conveyed in poetry, or in aesthetic communication in general, and explore and test its usefulness for a definition of poetic or aesthetic knowledge. I shall, however, refrain from this grand gesture and will confine myself to one partial aspect of this overwhelming question and consider the difference between the poetological knowledge of a certain period and its poetical praxis, its *poesis*, in the light of Ryle's distinction between *knowing that* and *knowing how*. This may, hopefully, help to go beyond the common reduction of *poesis* or poetry to an application of poetics. What I find particularly intriguing when it comes to the opposition between poetry and poetics is what lies in-between, i.e. what is poetry and poetics at the same time. What I shall focus on, therefore, is poetry that thematises its own poetological frames – is metapoetry as an encounter of poetry and poetics of the third kind¹¹.

II

Let me begin with a simple text-book case. From the late sixteenth century onwards, English manuals of poetics are aware of the “alexandrine”: they know that it is a verse of twelve syllables, that it is the standards measure of poetry in France and thus the functional equivalent to the English five-beat blank verse or the equally five-beat heroic couplet¹². A characteristic definition of the period is that of George Puttenham in his widely circulating *Arte of English Poesie* of 1589:

This meeter of twelue sillables the French man calleth a verse *Alexandrine*, and is with our moderne rimers most vsuall: with the ancient makers it was not so. For before Sir *Thomas Wiats* [Wyatt's] time they were not vsed in our vulgar, they be for graue and stately matters fitter than for any other ditty of pleasure¹³.

And the poets of his time followed the rules laid out by Puttenham down to what he says about the alexandrine's correlation with elevated subject matters. Thus, for instance, the Elizabethan sonneteers generally do not follow the model of Ronsard and the *Pléiade* but prefer the iambic five-beat verse for this genre of erotic poetry, which they considered too light and pleasur-

able for the stately alexandrine. If they used this French form at all, it was – as in Michael Drayton's praise of England, his *Poly-Olbion* (1596-1622) – for themes of national importance. Still, the alexandrine never really got naturalised in England; the reason for this was spelt out one and a half centuries later in Thomas Gray's *Observations on English Metre*:

Alexandrines, or verses of twelve syllables, [...] must, if they would strike the ear agreeably, have their pause in the middle [...]. And this uniformity in the cæsura is just the reason why we no longer use them but just to finish a lyric stanza [...]¹⁴.

This use of the alexandrine for creating a sense of closure at the end of a stanza, i.e. the use of its extra length in comparison to the preceding pentameters for providing metrical cadence and space to round off the stanza and look forward to the next, had already been observed by Samuel Johnson in his *Life of John Dryden*: «The Alexandrine was, I believe, first used by Spenser, for the sake of closing his stanza with a fuller sound»¹⁵. Edmund Spenser was, indeed, the first to employ the alexandrine this way in his allegorical chivalric romance, *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), for which he invented a new stanzaic form made up of eight elaborately rhymed iambic pentameters culminating in an alexandrine. Take the following example, the famous ekphrastic description of the statue of Venus in her grotto (book IV, canto x, stanza 40),

But it in shape and beautie did excell
 All other Idoles, which the heathen adore,
 Farre passing that, which by surpassing skill
Phidias did make in *Paphos* Isle of yore,
 With which that wretched Greeke, that life forlore
 Did fall in loue: yet this much fairer shined,
 But couered with a slender veile afore;
 And both her feete and legs together twyned
 Were with a snake, whose head & tail were fast combyned¹⁶.

The alexandrine here has a structural poetic function beyond merely rounding off the stanza, it frames and show-cases here, as it were, the visual images evoked in the preceding lines, thus setting it off from its context and highlighting it. To achieve such an effect requires a certain poetological knowledge about the alexandrine and its functions of closure, which the learned Spenser and inventor of this form no doubt commanded. Beyond that, however, this stanza demonstrates a great poetic *know how* which cannot be reduced to the *knowing that* of rules and regulations laid down in poetological treatises but is realised alone the poetic performance. This poetic *know how* shows, for instance, in how Spenser en-

hances the closure effect of the Alexandrine with rhyme words that foreground the semantics of “twyned” and “combyned”, of tying things up in conclusion. And it also shows in Spenser’s stretching of the inordinate length of the alexandrine even further by employing almost exclusively monosyllabic words with long vowels, and even more so does it show in the hieroglyphic and emblematic image of the serpent biting its own tail, which motivates semantically the metrical and structural function of the alexandrine and makes it meaningful¹⁷.

And now for the “encounter of the third kind” between poetry and poetics! It occurs at the interface of the poetological knowledge of the time with its poetical praxis and demonstratively deconstructs the opposition between poetry and poetics. Continuing to use the alexandrine as my paradigm, I turn for this to the early 18th century. In this period a convention flourished that was first introduced by Abraham Cowley and, more prominently, by John Dryden – the convention of occasionally damming up the quiet flow of the five-beat “heroic couplets” in their reflective poems or tragedies by an alexandrine, thus creating extra emphasis or moments of pause and reflection. It is this – as Thomas Gray considered it – «odd custom» of alexandrines «interspersed arbitrarily among verses of ten syllables»¹⁸ that we find addressed in young Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (1711). In this poem which, like Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, aims at summing up the poetological knowledge of his time in poetic form Pope deals extensively also with questions of meter and versification. Here is what he has to say about the alexandrine (verse 354-357):

Then, at the *last*, and *only* Couplet fraught
With some *unmeaning* Thing they call a *Thought*,
A *needless Alexandrine* ends the Song,
That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow length along¹⁹.

Pope goes well beyond what Spenser did in my previous example: though both link the alexandrine with a snake image, Pope alone explicitly refers with it to the poetic device of the alexandrine and its closure function. Thus he foregrounds the implementation of the six-beat alexandrine in the context of five-beat heroic couplets and turns it into a show-cased exhibition of the device. This is “performative” in the strict sense of linguistic pragmatics in that the form of the utterance here exemplifies what the utterance speaks about. In other words: the utterance itself “instantates” its propositional content; the utterance does what it says.

It is this auto-referential loop that turns the verse into a self-staging of the poetic *knowing how* on which it is based. This is further highlighted in the *ex negativo* strategy employed here: Pope’s alexandrine, just as before

the verses on triplets, on metrical regularity and on rhyme, demonstrate *ex negativo* what one should do by furnishing examples of how one should *not* do it. As the preceding series of “unmeaning” verses, i.e. verses formally correct but semantically inane, the culminating alexandrine is also “needless”, as superfluous and mechanical as they were. And the image of the snake, which in Spenser’s alexandrine hieroglyphically suggested infinity, now turns into the image of a wounded snake, which, like Pope’s alexandrine itself, does not get anywhere in spite of all its painful efforts. The sequence of almost exclusively monosyllabic long-vowel words – “like”, “wounded”, “snake”, “drag”, “slow” – seems to stretch the “length” both of the snake and of the verse itself to near unbearable lengths and in this it “enacts” – as a New Critic would have said²⁰ – phonologically and rhythmically the painful efforts made by snake and poet. These are brilliantly bad verses and as such they demonstrate once again the bravura of Pope’s poetic *knowing how*, his perfect mastery of the “Art of Sinking in Poetry”, to which he dedicated in 1727 an extended essay, *Peri Bathous, Or the Art of Sinking in Poetry*.

III

The know-how, the *knowing how*, which Pope stages so poetically in the *ex negativo* performances of his poetological verse epistle, is totally dedicated to the *knowing that* of the neo-classical doctrine of his times and confirms what the Augustans knew about poetry – namely that you do not only need a feeling heart and the knowledge of fixed rules to write poetry but also sharp reason and a witty brain. And even the wit with which Pope presents this knowledge upside-down to make it the more pregnant and convincing, subscribes to this doctrine and imitates its canonical models, among them most prominently Horace and his *Ars Poetica*.

What I am driving at here, however, is how a poem in the performance of its *knowing how* can stretch the poetological *knowing that* on which it is based to its limits or, even beyond that; how the poetic performance can lay bare the contradictions and aporias of the underlying poetics and “deconstruct” them, creating space for what is new. In this respect, my alexandrine examples have only been the first step of my argument, serving as a contrastive foil for what is to come. For this, I withdraw now from the 18th century, in which I fell less at home²¹, and choose for my next example of poetic *knowing how* exhibited in metapoetical poetry an English Renaissance poem, more specifically, a sonnet by Sir Philip Sidney.

The sonnet, a form fashioned and cultivated in Italy, had reached England in the early 16th century already. Accordingly, by Sidney’s time, explicit knowledge about this type of poem had already been filtered down to fairly

stable definitions in the manuals of poetics and rhetoric (the two still largely undifferentiated then). Let me quote as a typical example George Gascoigne's *Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English* (1575):

Then haue you Sonnets: some thinke that all Poemes (being short) may be called Sonnets, as in deede it is a diminutive worde derived of *Sonare*, but yet I can beste allowe to call those Sonnets whiche are of fouretene lynes, every line conteyning tenne syllables. The firste twelve do ryme in staues of foure lines by crosse meetre, and the last two ryming together do conclude the whole²².

Or, to say that with royal authority, the authority of the Scottish King James VI, Elizabeth's successor as the English King James I, who laid down in his *Schort Treatise Conteyning Some Revlis and Cautelis to be Observit and Eschewit in Scottis Poesie* of 1584 that sonnets consist «of fourtene lynis, and ten fete in every lyne» and applied that knowledge in two dedicatory sonnets to the reader and to the perfect poet²³.

The manuals of poetics and rhetorics know that a sonnet consists of fourteen lines arranged in rhymed groups of verses, they know that it derives from Italy and that it speaks of love and that the elaboration of this topic – lament over unrequited love or praise of the beloved's virtues and beauties – requires all the help that rhetorical art can offer. Thus King James insists in his dedicatory "Sonnet decifring the perfyte poete" that the writer of a sonnet has first of all

With memorie to keip quhat he dois reid,
With skilfulnes and figuris, quhilks proceid
From *Rhetorique*,

to become a perfect poet²⁴. He needs to know all the strategies of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* – of self-expression, appeal and argumentation – which rhetoric puts at his disposal. In George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), a poetological treatise particularly close to the handbooks of rhetoric, this becomes one of the defining elements or norms of the sonnet, which for Puttenham is dedicated primarily to the expression of oscillating and mixed feelings:

it requireth a forme of Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious and most witty of any others, wherof the ioyes were to be vttered in one sorte, the sorrowes in an other, and by the many formes of Poesie, the many moodes and pangs of louers, throughly to be discovered [...] with a thousand delicate deuises, odes, songs, elegies, ballads, sonets and other ditties, moouing one way and another to great compassion²⁵.

The manuals of poetics and rhetoric also agreed that the sonnet as a “lyric poem” occupied an elevated rank in the hierarchy of eight genres; both in Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie*, Francis Meres’s *Palladis Thámia* (1598) and in Philip Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* (posth. 1595) it took the second highest rank just beneath the “heroic poem”²⁶. For poems of such a cultural prestige, the manuals further agreed, *mimesis naturae*, i.e. the imitation of reality, in this case the beauty of the beloved and the truth of the lover’s emotions, did not suffice; it needed to be enhanced, embellished and heightened by *mimesis veterum*, i.e. the imitation of the classical masters, the canonical models of the genre, in this case, particularly Petrarch, whose best *inventions* and *topoi* they should imitate and even emulate or try to surpass in order to display their own wit at its most impressive and compelling.

The distinction between *mimesis naturae* and *mimesis veterum* had already been spelt out in England in the mid-16th century in Roger Ascham’s *Scholemaster*. In his chapter on imitation, he characteristically mentions only briefly the imitation «of the life of euerie degree of man» aiming at giving «a faire liuelie painted picture» of it, and concentrates rather on a second and a third type of imitation which consist in following «for learning of tonges and sciences the best authors»:

The third kinde of *Imitation* belongeth to the second: as, when you be determined whether ye will folow one or mo, to know perfitlie, and which way to folow, that one; in what place; by what meane and order; by what tooles and instrumentes ye shall do it; by what skill and iudgement ye shall trowelie discerne whether ye folow rightlie or no²⁷.

In the praxis of English *sonneteering*, which began in the early 16th century, this shows in the intensive dialogue of the “Courtly Makers” with Petrarch, whose sonnets were being variously translated and adapted to Tudor contexts²⁸. And it shows even more clearly when, in the second half of the century, the manuals of poetics and rhetoric, for instance Abraham Fraunce’s *Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588) increasingly draw upon English Petrarchan sonnets to exemplify and illustrate their rich and systematically classified arsenals of tropes and figures.

Imitatio veterum is a poetological program that appeals in particular to the experts of *knowing that*, the humanist scholars and schoolmasters. The sonneteers, however, or at least some of the best of them, soon began to turn against it with the better knowledge of the experienced practitioner. One of the first of them here – first both in time and in rank – was Sir Philip Sidney, who, a few years before his death in 1585 had written more or less at the same time not only one of the best English sonnet cycles, *Astrophil and Stella*, but

also the most incisive poetological text of the English Renaissance, his *Apologie for Poetrie*. In the critical light of Sidney's neo-Platonic re-foundation of poetological theory, which he develops in the first part of his *Apologie*, little of the contemporary English production, to which he turns in the second part, can pass muster. And his critique becomes particularly sharp when he addresses himself to the English sonneteers of his own times: their sonnets are so insignificant and ineffectual precisely because they follow religiously the poetico-rhetorical program of recycling again and again the devices of the canonical masters:

Other sorts of Poetry [besides drama] almost haue we none, but that Lyricall kind of Songs and Sonnets: which, Lord, if he gaue us so good mindes, how well it might be employed [...]. But truely many of such writings as come vnder the banner of vn-resistable loue, if I were a Mistres, would neuer perswade mee they were in loue; so coldely they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather red Louers writings, and so caught vp certaine swelling phrases, which hang together like a man which once tolde mee the winde was at North West, and by South, because he would be sure to name windes enowe [enough], – then that in truth they feele those passions, which easily (as I think) may be bewrayed [revealed] by that same forciblenes, or *Energia* (as the Greekes cal it), of the writer. But let this bee a sufficient though short note, that wee misse the right vse of the materiall point of Poesie²⁹.

What makes Sidney's text, the quality of his prose, so striking is that it is written with the kind of *energeia* that is conspicuously absent in the discursive prose of the contemporary English manuals and treatises of rhetoric and poetics. The emphatic gestuality of the language, the repeated self-references – «if I were a Mistres», «as I think» – and the personal anecdote give to his polemics against the *imitatores veterum* and the counter-productive artistry and artificiality of their discourses of love precisely that persuasive force based on personal experience in which the sonneteers attacked here lack so sadly. Though rejecting a particular rhetorical poetics, he does not, however, argue in a poetological nirvana but evokes in his brief reference to the performative force of *energeia* («as the Greekes cal it») an alternative aesthetics of expression and effect which goes back to Aristotle and Quintilian³⁰ and which, quite recently, Julius Caesar Scaliger in his *Poetices Libri Septem* (1561) had put on the agenda again in almost the same words: «Efficaciam Graeci ἐνέργειαν vocant»³¹.

What Sidney here opposes so energetically against the consensual knowledge of the poetological rhetoric or rhetorical poetics of his own culture, he explores and puts to the test in his sonnet cycle *Astrophil and Stella*, working out his own *knowing how* and exhibiting it at the same time. In a series of metapoetical sonnet, which punctuate his cycle, he thematises the poetological turn he advocates – the turn against the hackneyed Petrarchan

paradoxes of «freising fires» (sonnet 6), against the «Dictionarie's methode» of those who do nothing but rehearse once again «*Petrarch's* long deceased woes» (sonnet 15), against continuing to weave their poetic tapestry on «allegorie's curious frame» (sonnet 28) or against the withering wreaths of rhetoric's «choisest flowers», with which he will no longer adorn his own sonnets (sonnet 55)³². This begins already with the first sonnet, which, as often in sonnet cycles, is programmatically metapoetic:

Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine:
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine,

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay,
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes,
And others' feete still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speake, and helplesse in my throwes [throes],

Biting my trewand [truant] pen, beating my selfe for spite,
«Fool», said my Muse to me, «looke in thy heart and write»³³.

Sidney's sonnet follows faithfully the "English" sonnet form as set down by George Gascoigne: three quartets with alternate rhymes and a concluding couplet – the form that Shakespeare was soon to canonise in his *Sonnets* (first published in 1609, though some of them may have circulated in manuscript long before that date). He follows it, yet at the same time he varies and goes beyond it in at least three respects:

1. Instead of the iambic pentameter one would expect, this opening sonnet – as a few later ones (6, 8, 76, 77, 102) – employs a six-beat verse, which responds to the alexandrines of the *Pléiade* sonneteers, yet wavers between iambic, trochaic and dactylic metre and varies the caesura from line to line. Thus defeating the reader's expectation, it draws attention to itself and in particular to its meter and rhythm³⁴, and, with its extra syllables, these quasi-alexandrines allow for greater space and scope of argument.
2. The rhyme-scheme over-fulfils the norm of phonological equivalence in that all the rhymes of the three quartets revolve around two rhyming diphthongs only – [ei] and [ou]. This binds the quartets more closely together than usual and, at the same time, sets off the couplet with its new rhyming

diphthong [ai] more emphatically from the preceding three quartets than is the case even in Shakespeare's often surprising couplets.

3. The syntactical segmentation runs counter to the structural division of the English sonnet: a single sentence straddles the first two quartets, against which is set off the third quartet, which starts a new and adversative sentence («But words came halting forth»). This extends to and embraces the couplet, the concluding point of which is already introduced in the last verse of the third quartet («Thus great with child»). What shines through here as in a palimpsest, is the "Italian" or Petrarchan sonnet with its division into octave and sestet with its *volta* in the direction of the argument, a *volta* often clearly marked with the adversative *ma* or, just as here with Sidney's *but*.

Why do I enter into such formal or even formalistic details at such great lengths? – Because, as I shall try to demonstrate, these are not merely formalistic. They are the pre-condition and a crucial part of Sidney's poetic art and a demonstration of his artistic *knowing how* with which he challenges *in actu* the *knowing that* of the predominant rhetorical poetics of the sonnet. Mind you, the sonnet actually begins in the most elevated style of rhetoric with the particularly artificial figure of the pseudo-consecutive *climax* or *gradatio* which, following the textbook rules for effectual persuasion to the letter, leads from "pleasure" via "reading" to "knowledge" and then from "knowledge" via "pitié" to "grace", the graceful acceptance of the wooing lover by the lady. This is so highly rhetorical and so much in accordance with the teaching of the rhetorical treatises, that one of them, Abraham Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetorike* (I, 18) will actually quote the first five verses of this sonnet as a model of this figure of speech and hold it up for imitation³⁵. What Fraunce overlooked in his collecting frenzy is, however, that Sidney here has his speaker narrate a story the point of which defies and denies the knowledge of the rhetorical handbooks and thus also that of his own *Arcadian Rhetorike*! The story about himself as loving wooer, the story how he had tried to win his lady's grace, begins on an optimistic note, his initial trust in the persuasive powers of *imitatio veterum* as set down in the manuals: the study of "inventions fine" in the poetic "leaves" (7) and "feet" (11) of the canonical authors. He then goes on to tell us, how this confidence broke down to give way to a sense of paralysis and aporia described, at the beginning of the third quartet, as a kind of writer's block, and how it turns at the end into the painful despair of never-ending birth "throws" (12) and self-flagellation. Deliverance from this comes only at the very end, in the last line, actually the last half-line, in the words the Muse spoke to him: «Looke in thy heart and write».

This story stages a poetological opposition revolving round one crucial term, which is highlighted as such by being used three times: "invention" (6, 9, 10). It appears in two different forms: once in the plural and non-capi-

talised and twice capitalised and in the singular. While the pluralised “inventions” of the second quartet are sought for in the writings of the others and thus are closely related to the study and imitation of canonical models, the personified “Invention” of the following quartet is related directly to the imitation of nature, as the genealogical allegory of child, mother and step-mother makes clear. The opposition is so transparently structured that it can readily be represented in a diagram:

<i>Inventions</i>	vs.	<i>Invention</i>
study		Nature
others' leaves		thy heart
others' feete		
> <i>imitatio veterum</i>		<i>imitatio naturae</i>
study		loving in truth
wits, brain, fine		heart
> <i>rationaly calculated</i>		<i>spontaneous</i>
sunne-burn'd braine		fresh and fruitfull showers
leaves [of a book]		leaves [of a plant]
feete [metrical]		feete [anatomical]
biting, beating		great with child, throwes
> <i>sterility</i>		<i>vitality, fertility</i>
show, cause, make, win		looke, write
obtain, entertain...		truth
> <i>rhetorical persuasion</i>		<i>poetic self-expression</i>

The story the speaker tells about himself does, however, not only speak explicitly in its transparently antithetical terms about the rhetorical-poetic system which it rejects; the way it is told, and the way it plays with and against the formal structure of the sonnet, enacts or performs what it is about. The increasing tensions between the metrical division of the sonnet and the syntactical division in sentences and clauses, together with the increase in rhyme-words formed by static nouns and the parallel increase in seemingly endless purely iambic verses (1, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12) right down to the threshold of the concluding couplet, enact rhythmically the movement of the story – the movement from its hopeful opening gestures, which then get bogged down more and more until, at the very end, the intervention of the Muse, her «Looke in thy heart and write», launches a new and liberating impulse. The liberating impulse is delayed to the very last moment and this makes it

the more surprising and emphatic: syntactically it is initiated in the third but last verse, rhyme-wise in the penultimate verse, and in terms of argument in the last verse, to be stated pointedly only in the last half-verse. What further enhances the effect of «Looke in thy heart and write» is its style: it totally disrupts what has been the sonnet's stylistic norm so far. What could, after the syntactic complexities and the rhetorical elaborations of the preceding lines, be simpler than this appeal in throughout monosyllabic, non-figurative and kersey "Germanic" words? What we seem to witness here is the breakthrough of the speaker to a new, direct, immediate language of the heart – if not the breakthrough, in the heart of Renaissance poetry, to a Romantic aesthetics of unmediated self-expression, the often celebrated moment of "birth of the modern subject".

Things are, however, hardly ever of such mythical simplicity. If we look closer at the poem, we realise that the performance of the speaker with which Sidney stages his own *knowing how* is not all that simple. What tells against the simple and widely accepted reading is most obviously that the following 107 sonnets of the cycle do by no means renounce the highly ornate style and the argumentative strategies recommended by rhetorical poetics; they actually take them to extremes again and again. And what equally tells against it is that this particular and programmatic first sonnet helps itself quite avidly to the verbal delicacies of the rhetorical banquet – the *gradatio* and *repetitio*, the *figura etymologica* and the *polyptoton*, the *hyperbole*, *metaphora*, *metonymia*, *paronomasia* and *allegoria*. And even its final point remains deeply, even parasitically, indebted to rhetorical knowledge: to renounce rhetoric is in itself a time-honoured rhetorical device. Just think of Mark Antony's «I am no orator» in his great funeral speech in *Julius Caesar* (III, ii, 208), demonstrating his superb rhetorical skills in the very act of denying them! Renouncing rhetorical art is in itself a rhetorical strategy, part of rhetoric's arsenal of persuasive devices, a specific form of *dissimulation* with which, by way of *celare* or *negare artem*, the speaker fashions for himself the captivating masque of artless sincerity. And, more specifically, the appeal to find in one's own heart, and not in canonical models, the most fertile source of inspiration is in itself a poetic topos of canonical love poetry, according to which the lover who follows the appeal to "look in his heart" will find in his very heart the image of his beloved, the true object of his sincere *imitatio naturae*.

Wherein, then, resides Sidney's own and particular *know-how*? It resides in his art of exhibiting in "energetic" and sharply pointed performances that there is no way of *not* speaking rhetorically, neither for the politician nor for the lover. This is a kind of knowledge beyond the rhetorical and poetological manuals of his time and was to be put into the discursive terms of *knowing that* only by linguists and language philosophers in our own times. Sid-

ney's *knowing how*, embodied and enacted in the performance of his sonnet, thus does not only *translate* contemporary rhetorical *knowing that* into poetic language, but *transcends* it by showing up and showcasing its limitations. It was precisely in this achievement that Sidney's sonnets became the new model for other Elizabethan sonneteers, among them, most prominently, Shakespeare³⁶.

Such *knowing how* can never be fully translated into discursive explicitness and any poetological discourse therefore must always fall short of this kind of knowledge, which only emerges in, and from, embodied and dramatised performances and can alone be communicated in the enactment and re-enactment of such a drama and theatre of language. For this, I can evoke the authority of the first Sidney critic, himself a great performance artist in prose, the authority of Thomas Nashe, who wrote in his preface to the first quarto edition of *Astrophil and Stella* (1591):

let not your surfeted sight [...] think scorne to turn aside into this Theater of pleasure, for here you shal find a paper stage streud with pearle, an artificial heau'n to ouersadow the fair frame, & christal wals to encounter your curious eyes, while the tragicommodity of loue is performed by starlight³⁷.

It is in the performative *knowing how*, as I have tried to show, that the potential of poetic and aesthetic communication for innovation as well as for resistance and subversion resides. To expect from a poem any extension or progress of *knowing that* can only lead to disappointment; for that one better turns to the propositional discourses of science and philosophy. The "singular" achievement of the literary and the aesthetic realises itself in performances rather, each one of them an event and a process – in performances that do not simply thematise the propositions of *knowing that* but, as it were, thematise the thematising of such propositions and thus put them – and it – in question. To say it with Derek Attridge in his remarkable essay on *The Singularity of Literature*: «literature does not present themes as such, but rather takes the reader through a process of thematising». And that also means that

in performing [and that would include reading as well] the work, I am taken through its performance of language's potency; indeed, I, or the "I" that is engaged with the work, could be said to be performed by it. This performed I is an I in process, undergoing the changes wrought by, and in, the encounter with alterity³⁸.

Notes

1. Hesiod, *Theogony*, verses 27 f., my translation.

2. See W. K. Wimsatt Jr., C. Brooks, *Socrates and the Rhapsode*, in Idd., *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, Knopf, New York 1957, pp. 3-20.

3. M. Fuhrmann (Hrsg.), *Aristoteles Poetik*, Reclam, München 1976, pp. 58-61.
4. Sir Philip Sidney, *Apology for Poetry*, in G. G. Smith (ed.), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vls., Clarendon Press, Oxford 1904, I, pp. 161-4.
5. W. K. Wimsatt, *The Concrete Universal*, in W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington 1967, pp. 69-83.
6. G. Ryle, *Knowing How and Knowing That*, in "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society", 46, 1945-46, pp. 1-16; it was reprinted as chapter 2 of Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (Hutchinson's University Library, London 1949). – See my own essay, of which the present is a substantially enlarged English version, *Sidneys Know-how: Vom performativen Mehrwert der Metapoese gegenüber dem poetologischen Wissen in der englischen Renaissance*, in K. W. Hempfer, A. Traninger (Hrsg.), *Dynamiken des Wissens*, Rombach, Freiburg i. Br. 2007, pp. 91-107.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 8 and p. 14.
11. See for "metapoetry" E. Müller-Zettelmann, *Lyrik und Metalyrik. Theorie einer Gattung und ihrer Selbstbespiegelung anhand von Beispielen aus der englisch- und deutschsprachigen Dichtkunst*, Winter, Heidelberg 2000, chapter 4.
12. For a short history of the alexandrine in the European literatures see A. Preminger (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1965, pp. 11-2.
13. G. Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, Scolar Press Facsimile, Scolar Press, Menston 1968, p. 60.
14. T. Gray, *Observations on English Metre*, in J. Drinkwater (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Gray with a Selection of Letters and Essays*, Dent, London 1912, pp. 327-48, here p. 331.
15. S. Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. L. Archer Hind, 2 vls., Jones, London 1925, I, p. 260.
16. E. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Th. P. Roche Jr., Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1978, p. 694.
17. See Roche's note, *ibid.*, p. 1179.
18. Gray, *Observations*, cit., see also Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, cit., I, p. 260.
19. *An Essay on Poetry*, in J. Butt (ed.), *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, Methuen, London 1963, pp. 143-68, here pp. 154-5.
20. See the lemma "dramatic" in the "poetological glossary" of the terminology of New Criticism in W. Erzgräber (Hrsg.), *Englische Lyrik von Shakespeare bis Dylan Thomas*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1969, pp. 399-469, here pp. 420-2.
21. Though, changing the genre from poetry to fiction, Laurence Sterne would also provide me with ample illustrative material and fodder for thought; see my *Laurence Sterne. Writers and Their Work*, Northcote House, Tavistock 2001.
22. Quoted in G. G. Smith (ed.), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vls., Oxford University Press, Oxford 1904, I, p. 55.
23. *Ibid.*, I, p. 223.
24. *Ibid.*, I, p. 211; in English: «With memory to keep what he does read, / With skilfulness and figures, which proceed / From Rhetoric».
25. Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, cit., p. 36.
26. In Sir John Harington's *Brief Apology for Poetry*, which prefaces his translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591), lyric poetry, however, only takes the penultimate rank. See for these conflicting rhetorical and poetological hierarchies H. F. Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2004, pp. 152-4.
27. Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, cit., I, pp. 7-8.
28. See for this the instructive *anthologie raisonnée* by A. Mortimer, *Petrarch's Canzoniere in the English Renaissance*, new edition revised and enlarged, Rodopi, Amsterdam-New York 2005.

29. Quoted in Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, cit., I, p. 201.
30. See Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, cit., pp. 98 f. and passim (see also the key-words *enargeia* and *energ(e)ia* in the index). – For the close relationship between ἐνέργεια and ἐνάρπεια (the art of putting an object right in front of the reader's eyes and of making it present to him), which Sidney also intends here, see G. P. Sharping, *Towards a Rhetoric of Experience: the Role of Enargeia in the Essays of Montaigne*, in "Rhetorica", 20, 2002, pp. 173-92 and I. Lunde, *Rhetorical Enargeia and Linguistic Pragmatics. On Speech-reporting Strategies in East Slavic Medieval Hagiography and Homiletics*, in "Journal of Historical Pragmatics", 5, 2004, pp. 49-80, here in particular pp. 49-55.
31. Poetices Libri Septem, III, p. 26; quoted in L. Deitz, G. Vogt-Spira, *Poetices Libri Septem / Sieben Bücher über die Dichtkunst*, Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1994, II, p. 336.
32. I quote from W. A. Ringler (ed.), *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1962; repr. 1971.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
34. See J. Thompson, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Forsaken Iamb*, in "Kenyon Review", 20 (1958), pp. 90-115.
35. A. Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike*, ed. E. Seaton, Blackwell, Oxford 1950, p. 39.
36. See my essay "As an Unperfect Actor on the Stage": *Notes Towards a Definition of Performance and Performativity in Shakespeare's Sonnets*, in E. Müller-Zetzelmann, M. Rubik (eds.), *Theory Into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2005, pp. 207-28.
37. Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, cit., II, p. 223. See for this the illuminating chapter on *Theatrum Elocutionis, or Stagings of Language*, in Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, cit., pp. 272-88.
38. D. Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, Routledge, London 2004, p. 98.